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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 001182

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/E AND DRL;
LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV PINS DJ

SUBJECT: POLICE FIRE ON PROTESTERS DURING DESTRUCTION OF
SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS

Classified By: Pol/Econ Erinn C. Stott for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: An operation to remove illegal squatter houses began on November 22, 2005 in the area known as Arhiba II in the capital city Djibouti. On November 30, the last scheduled day of operations, police fired on angry inhabitants who were throwing stones at authorities. Four persons are reported dead and between eight and twelve injured. The Ministry of Interior reported fifteen policemen were injured during the confrontation. This operation is part of a wider process conducted by the Ministry of Interior during the past few months to fight crime, insalubrity and illegal housing in the capital. Opposition and the Djiboutian League of Human Rights condemned the killing of innocent citizens and warned the government that this action will indirectly undermine the already threatened civil peace.

12. (C) In the past several months, a marked rise in crime has been a subject of great concern in Djibouti City. The rise has been attributed to illegal immigrants. In response, the government decided to undertake a large-scale operation to remove and destroy illegal houses, where illegal aliens usually live. The removal undertaken in Arhiba II beginning November 22 was part of this operation. Arhiba is an overcrowded and unsanitary quarter inhabited mainly by Afars. Arhiba II is comprised of mainly Afar port workers. Djiboutian citizens and illegal workers live side by side in Arhiba II.

13. (C) During the initial days of the operation, authorities relocated the citizens in Hayabley (Balbala zone) to open areas near PK 20. Individuals removed from Hayabley were told to rebuild their houses with their own resources. The operation continued without incident for six days. The last wave of persons to be removed refused to be relocated unless given construction materials or given the permission to extract the wood from their houses to rebuild since they said they could not afford to buy new materials.

14. (C) Following the order by public works personnel that evicted persons should take nothing except their personal items, those affected began insulting and throwing stones at the public works agents and the five policemen present at the time. Arhiba II inhabitants gathered and became very agitated. Policemen and Gendarmerie responded with tear gas. Four persons were reported killed and between eight and twelve injured. Fifteen policemen were reportedly injured, eight of which sustained serious wounds.

15. (C) On December 1st, the Minister of Interior issued a press release reproduced in the local newspaper, La Nation, stating "while agents of the public works service were supposed to continue the relocation operations begun on November 22nd, they were threatened by hostile young people. Police intervened to protect the civil servants. A crowd out of control began throwing stones and other projectiles at the civil servants. Police had to use force in order to establish order. As a result, fifteen policemen were injured, eight of them seriously; nine citizens were lightly injured. Two police vehicles were damaged; a third vehicle had a bullet impact. An investigation has been ordered to determine the circumstances of these troubles" (end of press release).

16. (C) Opposition and the Djiboutian League of Human Rights have condemned the "dramatic and muscled operations." The Union for Democratic Alternance (UAD, opposition coalition) reported "shooting with real bullets occurred toward civilians while they were peacefully rejecting the destruction of their personal belongings." UAD reported four dead, twenty injured as well as disappeared civilians. The Djiboutian League of Human Rights (LDDH) called the operation a "massacre." The President of UAD requested that foreign militaries present in Djibouti not support this new massacre against poor civilians with their silence. LDDH is wary of the political implications of this action against the Afar population.

17. (C) Comment: The government may be pursuing a double goal with this operation. On the one hand it targets crime and unease that is a major concern in this area of the capital, but it also may be hunting hidden members of the Afar

rebellion that are believed to be using Arhiba as a staging base before deploying to the northern regions. The government has been particularly concerned about increasing Afar unrest since two of its armed forces members were killed in an ambush two weeks ago allegedly set by the armed rebellion 60 km north of Tadjourah. "The armed-FRUD of Kaddamy" claimed responsibility. Mohamed Kaddamy was the spokesman in Europe of Armed-FRUD (Ahmed Dini's movement) during the civil war. After the late Ahmed Dini signed the peace accord, Kaddamy refused the terms of the accord and decided to pursue the struggle against the Djiboutian government. The killing of the two soldiers in the north remains the only action undertaken by this faction since the signing of the Peace Accord in 2001.

18. (C) Comment continued: A few days ago, the Director of President Guelleh's cabinet, Ismail Tani, confirmed to the Embassy the ambush that occurred on or around November 20th resulting in the death of two soldiers. He added the government was angry about the ambush, and that it was trying to gather proof to bring opposition leaders to justice, as the government was "sure" that the backers of this action were the opposition leaders in Djibouti despite the claim of responsibility by Kaddamy in Paris. End Comment.
RAGSDALE